

Maharajadhiraja Dr. Kameshwara Singh
[1907–1962]

MAHARAJADHIRAJA DR. KAMESHWARA SINGH

By

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A distinguished scion of an illustrious House, a zealous patron af learning and art, a ruler of unique foresight and understanding, a great patriot and legislator, a symbol of liberalism and generosity, a bold reformer, and above all, a gentleman *par excellence*, Mahārājādhirāja Dr. Kameshwara Singh was one of the few charming personalities of the age whose influence was keenly felt in all the walks of Maithila life. Born on 28 November, 1907 the young Mahārāja was given the best education under the personal supervision of his great scholar-father Mahārājādhirāja Sir Rameshwara Singh and was placed under the guidance of the well-known theosophist of the age, Miss Lilian Edgar as well as a number of other experienced teachers, to educate him in different branches of learning. All this tremendously contributed to his mature thinking which he amply showed when he was called upon to hold the reins of his Estate at an early age of 22 only. To the amazement of all concerned the first action of the young Maharaja demonstrated his great affection for his younger brother Raja Bahadur Bishweshwara Singh who was offered the Rajnagar Circle which yielded an annual income of seven lacs of rupees. His affection for his brother throughout his life was so exemplary that it is hard to find a parallel in recent memory.

Another notable event of the young Maharaja's life was his bold decision to attend the Round Table Conference in London at the invitation of the Government of India. This virtually led to a revolt on the part of the Maithila Brāhmaṇas and resulted in an unprecedented crisis in the Maithila society. Of all the persons, how could Mithileśa, the leader of the most staunch followers of *Sanātana dharma* (i. e. the Maithilas) cross the sea, prohibited for Hindus by the *Dharmaśāstras* ? It was unthinkable

for a people who have carried conservatism to the excess of uncouthness. How could this erstwhile home of Hindu enlightenment tolerates this mental emancipation outside its pale which it had been so zealous to suppress throughout the centuries ? There was a blistering campaign against his decision and the young Maharaja was faced with a grave crisis of conscience. But, the great patriot and undaunted reformer in him could not be deterred by such puerile agitations and commotions, for he fully realised that he would be failing in his duty by not participating in a Conference which was to discuss the various questions affecting his country's destiny. It was undoubtedly an act of extra-ordinary foresight and boldness on his part which had a far-reaching consequence on the advancement of the Community as was proved by subsequent event.

As President of the Bihar Landholders Association, the Maharaja made unique contributions to the agrarian reforms in Bihar. He guided its policy during its most critical years which witnessed a considerable unrest among the tenants, sometimes leading to serious distrubances, and great irritation among the Zamindars who were in no way prepared to take it lying down. Though the agrarian question had been agitating the minds of the public since the closing years of the last century, its pace was accelerated by the advent of the Provincial Autonomy leading to the formation of the Congress Ministry in some of the provinces. The situation was so explosive that any retaliatory act on the part of the irritated Zamindars would have sparked off a spate of violent bloodsheds, suicidal to the cause of national interest. It demanded a tactful and wise leader to deal with the problems to the best satisfaction of the tenants as well as the Zamindars. The Maharaja came forward to intervene in time ; held a conference of the Zamindars of the province on September 15, 1937 at Patna ; impressed upon them the advisability of concerted and wise action and thus by tactful handling of the situation affected an honourable compromise between the Zamindars of Bihar and the Congress party. This compromise was responsible for amending the Bihar Tenancy Act in such a way that it secured to the

tenants the rights of restoration of *bakasht* lands as well as gave some relief to the Zamindars in the income tax.

With the attainment of independence in 1947, the question of land reforms again raised its head and subsequently the Zamindari Abolition Bill came to be passed by the legislature. This touched off another storm of controversy in the country. While the tenants or *Kisans* jubilantly hailed the act and heaved a sigh of relief, the Zamindars angrily protested against the measure. On this issue the Maharaja also differed with the Government and challenged the act in the Court. It created a tense situation, and instead of aggravating it the national leaders thought it wise to appeal to the noble sentiments of the Maharaja whose nationalistic feelings were above board. The Maharaja was also quick to respond to their appeals and gave up his opposition.

Thus, on the whole, the Maharaja had always been on good term with the British Government as well as with the national Government of India. When he attained the minimum age prescribed for a legislator, he was nominated a member to the Council by the British Government. But, he always expressed his views in the Council frankly and boldly which remind us of the born nationalist in him who feared none and spared none. On September 4, 1932, while inaugurating the Bihar United Party at Ranchi, he delivered a classic speech declaring that the British Government should concede to us *Svarājya* or full liberty in the management of our own affairs "which we consider to be our birth-right". During the great upheaval in 1942, when the British Government wanted to requisition a body of horsemen from the Raj to suppress the great rising, he refused it outright. Moreover, he gave financial help to the Congress Organization and to several of its leaders individually. Dr. Rajendra Prasad, the first President of India, was a great friend of the Maharaja.

A great patron of learning, the Maharaja, to the best tradition of his House, donated a sum of Rs. 1,20,000 for the creation of the Mithilesha Rameshwara Singh Mathili Chair in Patna University for research in Maithilī language and literature imme-

diately after his accession to the *gaddi*. His contributions to the promotion of Sanskrit learning were equally unique. As President of the Bihar Sanskrit Association, he impressed upon the national Government the necessity of amending the Constitution so that the Association might function as a full-fledged University in the Province. He started the well-known "Mithiliesha Mahesha Lectureship" in Sanskrit by giving a munificent endowment to the Association to enable it to invite eminent Snnskrit scholars of the country to deliver these lectures. He was also the President of the Bihar Sanskrit Re-organisation Committee. Besides, numerous *tols* and *Pāṭhaśālās* had been established by him which were entirely financed by the Raj. The Present Mithila Research Institute owes its existence to the inspiration and munificence of the Maharaja. And, finally, the establishment of the Kameshwara Singh Sanskrit University at Darbhanga through his efforts and donations will go down as an eternal monument to his great love of Sanskrit language and literature for which, Mithilā, the land of his great ancestors, has been noted since time immemorial.

Sanskrit apart, his love of technical and vocational education was no less great. The introduction of a full course of industrial training in the curriculum of the Raj High School, Darbhanga with modern scientific apparatus, his donations of one lac of rupees for the development of the Science section of C. M. College, Darbhanga etc. are only a few instances of his love for technical education.

His life-long association with various educational and cultural institutions eloquently speaks of his great interest in general education. He was Pro-Chancellor of Kameshwara Singh Sanskrit University and Banaras Hindu University, a life-member of the Patna, Bihar and Allahabad Universities, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society and a Vice-Patron of the Patna, Bihar and Allahabad Universities, a member of the Royal Asiatic Society and a Vice-Patron of the Bihar Research Society. Besides, the founding of the *Indian Nation* and the *Āryāvarta*

are instances of his invaluable services to the cause of Indian journalism.

His liberal donations to various works of charity and public utility reflect his genuine feelings and concern for the suffering mass. Whenever such opportunities presented, the Maharaja always rose equal to the occasion. His service to the people of Bihar during the great earthquake of 1934 will always be remembered by posterity with profound gratitude. He donated Rs. 1,00,000 to the Viceroy's Earthquake Relief Fund; Rs. 1,00,000 to King George Memorial (Anti-Tuberculosis) Fund; Rs. 1,00,000 to the Darbhanga District Board for sinking tube-wells in the earthquake-affected areas of the district; a Rolls Royce Car (used by Maharani Kameshwari Priya) to the Darbhanga Orphange; and gold worth Rs. 54,000 to the local *Gośālā*, besides donations to the other innumerable institutions in the country.

A great builder and lover of art, the Maharaja completely changed the old face of the Raj area and converted it into a new, planned township by constructing beautiful buildings with most modern sanitary fittings which attracted visitors from all over the country. The devastating earthquake of 1934 had caused immense destruction of the Raj buildings. But within a few years the traces of that terrible calamity were completely wiped off, and instead, magnificent buildings sprang up over the whole area which still constitute splendid specimens of architectural brilliance. For this exemplary effort on his part, Lord Willingdon the then Governor-General of India, paid glowing tributes to his genius at a banquet given in his honour when the latter had visited Darbhanga on November 30, 1935. Lord Willingdon's speech on this occasion was a marvellous piece of poetry in prose enumerating the many-sided qualities of his head and heart.

The hands of cruel Fate spare none, and the last great scion of this illustrious House of Darbhanga passed away on October 1, 1962, though at an immature age of 55 only, yet in all glory and splendour. He was an embodiment of modesty

and affability and an ideal brother whose love for his younger brother was exemplary even for ordinary people; and no misfortune overwhelmed him with grief more than the sad and premature demise of his brother in 1959—a shock which he could not survive for long. Within 3 years of this tragic event, the builder and lover of learning and art himself passed away a sad and broken heart. His sad death stunned the whole country with grief and with his passing away a great epoc in the history of Mithilā came to a sudden and abrupt close.

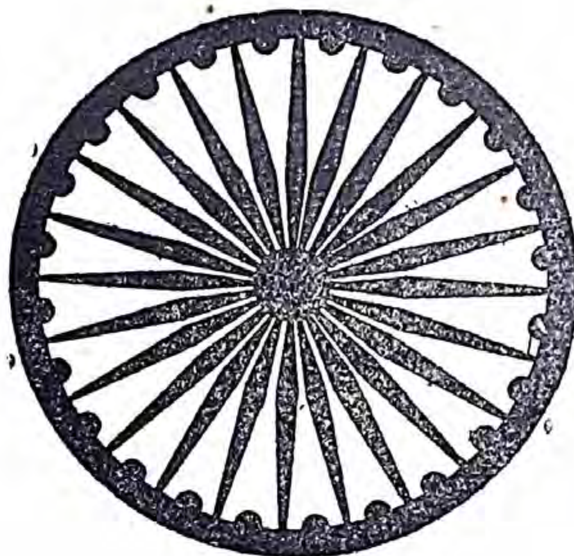
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